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FOLLY OF TARIFF ON ART

We have in America the most complete collections of modern pictures in the world. But we have a heavy tariff to keep them out, and we have a double tariff on the works of the old masters. It is mortifying. I cannot understand it. Why Americans, who are the keenest headed people in the world, keep art out by a tariff is more than I can explain.

I am a painter, and not a business man, so I do not know how to go about to get the tariff taken off. It should be taken off, because it prevents good pictures from being brought here to help us.

At the Paris Exposition there was a great collection of eighteenth-century portraits owned by an American, who will not bring them to this country because of the duty. I know of two other collections of nearly equal merit, likewise owned by Americans, and kept abroad because of the tariff. The lowest figure I have heard placed on the first is six hundred thousand dollars. The tariff would be sixty per cent of this. If the duty were taken off they would be in this country within a month.

Such good pictures eventually get into the museums, and here we need them for our students. There are about one thousand American art students in Paris. If there were good pictures in this country, two-thirds of these students might have studied them here, and have been much stronger before they went abroad to study.

The tax on art in the Dingley schedules is indefensible on almost any grounds. Even if considerable revenue were raised by the duty, broad-minded people, who have a just notion of the educational influence of art, would oppose the tax upon the great paintings of the world. But the effect of the duty is to keep out works of real value, and thus deprive the American people, as well as the artistic world, of the pleasure and benefit to be gained from them.

There is no protection to the art "industry" of the United States in keeping the old masters in Europe by means of a barbarous tariff. Considering the question on the merely business basis, the tax on art is folly, which fosters art actively abroad and stifles it at home.

I confess that I do not know how to remedy this evil, but it is plain that a duty rests upon artists to make an effort. The subject should be taken directly to Congress. It will probably be useless to appeal to Secretary Gage to use his influence with Congress in revising the art schedules. There is a world of ideas beyond finance with which Secretary Gage is not likely to show much sympathy, inasmuch as he is unfamiliar with it. The artists and all art associations, together with the directors of art museums and educational institutions, should take concerted action.

JOHN W. ALEXANDER.